Parkersville state's first town

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Much of the east Clark County area owes its origin to a few industrious and adventurous pioneers who decided to a make a go of settling an area on the north shore of the Columbia River that would eventually expand out into Washougal and Camas.

Before the formation of Camas-Washougal, however, this burgeoning community held the name of Parkersville. Although David C. Parker, for whom the town was named, was the first official landowner in the present State of Washington, the history of the area reflects a number of previous families as original settlers.

Beyond Native Americans, who archaeologists say have been in the area for centuries, the first white men to set foot in this area were British Naval Lt. William R. Broughton and the exploration party he led in 1792.

The first Americans to pay a visit to the area were Meriwhether Lewis and William Clark in 1806. Their famous exploration made a brief stop near the mouth of the Washougal River.

Beyond the occasional trader, fur trapper and other explorer to pass through the area, it wasn't until 1838 that the first settler came to the current proximity of Camas-Washougal. Richard Howe (also spelled Ough) was a British seaman who worked on Hudson's Bay Company ships for several years, sailing between the Columbia River region and London. In 1838, he came to stay at the "Washougal Camp."

It was also in that year that he met and married an Indian woman by the name of Princess White Wing (also known as Betsy). Howe eventually died in 1884 at the age of approximately 90. His wife reportedly lived to the age of 112.

During the winter of 1844-45, another group of people arrived in the local area. Actually, the first stop for this group was The Dalles in Oregon in 1844. The leader of the wagon train was an Irish-American named Michael T. Simmons from Kentucky. The funding for the journey, however, was provided mostly by George Washington Bush. He was a freeborn black man, originally from Pennsylvania. After moving to Missouri, Bush made his fortune in farming.

When this group reached Oregon, they learned that the provisional territorial government had decided barring blacks would be the easiest way to not have to deal with the question of slavery.

To escape the prejudice of the Oregon government, the Bush's and several other families crossed the river and settled where Parkersville would soon be located.

Eventually, Bush and Simmons moved on to the Puget Sound area of Washington.

In 1845, Parker finally made it out here from Missouri and was granted the first [illegible] in what would become the State of Washington.

His homestead was in the approximate location where the Port of Camas-Washougal office and Marina are presently situated.

Parker was born in Clay County, Ky., in 1804. In 1838, he married his wife, Ann.

An account of the Parker family history was written in 1986 and submitted to the Camas-Washougal Historical Society. The account was written by the James F. Cormack family, the great grandson of David Parker.

The account notes that on the family's journey out to the new territory in 1844, many hardships were experienced. When they left Missouri they had 100 head of cattle. Arriving in The Dalles, they were down to one horse and one ox.

When the Parkers reached The Dalles, they chose not to go on with the wagon train that carried them out to Washington. Instead, they got on a raft and floated down and over to the north shore of the Columbia River, arriving at a spot that would be named Parker's Landing.

After arriving, Parker eventually built a home and, later, the small dock that would become Parker's Landing. At the dock, supplies were received to accommodate the various merchant ships that steamed up the river.

According to the family account, Parker was also said to have helped build the first road to Vancouver.

Parker eventually died in 1858. But, before his death, several other families had arrived in the area, including the Gibbons in 1847, Maxons in 1849, the Hunsackers in 1852, and the Brauns in 1857.

Also new to the area was Lewis VanVleet. He arrived from Michigan and claimed a homestead in Fern Prairie, north of Camas, in 1853.

Upon Parker's death, VanVleet acted as administrator of Parker's estate. In payment for his services, VanVleet received a parcel of the Parkersville property. That parcel of property remained in the VanVleet family until 1968, when it was purchased by the Port of Camas-Washougal.

The township of Parkersvillle had faded away long before then, though. In the later 1800s, people started taking up residence in the newly forming towns of Camas and Washougal, just a little to the north of Parkersville.

In more recent years, interest in the Parkersville site has been on the increase. However, it did not gain this renewed interest until a group of local citizens became involved in getting the Parkersville site named as a historic landmark.

Camas resident Roberta Tidland has been one of those involved with the historic preservation effort. Discussing the Parkersville site, she said the township used to encompass 100-square acres. Today, the historic site is approximately 3.88 acres in size.

Until 1978, the current acreage contained the VanVleet home. It was actually a combination of two homes. A house from Parkersville and one from Fern Prairie were combined to make one home. However, in October 1978, the house was destroyed by a fire originally reported to have been arson caused.

The current historic site has been separated into three sections by the Parker's Landing Development Committee. The most visible monument to the old township is a rose arbor that has only recently been constructed in the site's "B" section.